

Range Wars: Cinematic Portrayals of the Contemporary Great Plains

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In the mythology of the American West, "range wars" pitted ranchers against farmers, "insiders" vs. "outsiders", each struggling to control access to land, each fighting to preserve the freedom and opportunities that first drew them to the Plains. The concept of "range wars" began with actual historic events but was molded into a mythic conflict, greater and grander than it actually was. Today, in contemporary films, the Plains are again a battleground as "insiders"/ "outsiders" attempt to find a "place" for themselves on the Plains and ultimately are forced out. *Boys Don't Cry* (2000) and *The Laramie Project* (2002) walk a fine-line between film and documentary, with their basis in actual violent events and utilizing documentary film elements. Both films also draw extensively on the Western film genre, through the focus on elements such as masculinity, violence, "insiders"/ "outsiders" tensions, setting, and the search for place. Through *Boys Don't Cry* and *The Laramie Project*, the Plains landscape is constructed/reconstructed as the West, Western and Frontier. As a result, the contemporary Plains, once the focus of a Jeffersonian vision of independence, land, and opportunity, is presented as a violent frontier landscape where "outsiders" are not accepted and ultimately, where no one with any "heroic" virtues would want to be.